

Western MRS Meeting Notes
May 24, 2007
Black Mountain Library

Counties Present: Buncombe, Caldwell, Catawba, Cherokee, Graham, Haywood, Macon, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Yancey

Introductions

News from Raleigh

Canada

New Secretary Dep Dempsey Benson

Discussion Items

Stopping Family Assessments

CFTs

CF SR Issue

Shared Parenting

Services Recommended

Canada

- Patrick and Holly did a presentation in Toronto for the province of Ontario Canada (which is about the size of Texas.)
- In Canada they do Child Welfare differently than we do. They have private agencies (children's aid societies) that are government funded who do their Child Welfare. There are 85 of these agencies and 100% of them attended.
- Had about 600-700 supervisors in the province and 603 were at this symposium
- They implemented differential response in April of this last year so they are still new at it. Are not doing all of the 7 strategies, just differential response.
- One woman is coming to Roanoke VA and wanted to come visit a county nearby when she is there. Were very interested in CFTs.
- Patrick and Holly were very well received, people wanted them to come back and visit their individual agencies, and also expressed interest in coming to a county here in NC – even mentioned an exchange program with Guilford.

New Secretary Dempsey Benson

- Just announced that he will be the new Secretary.
- He was the head of the task force that dealt with the Chemical fire in Apex (that is all we really know at this point!)

5104 Contributory Factors

- DCD May 9th letter addressing the completion and entry of Contributory Factors .
- Should be completed for cases substantiated and found In Need of Services.
- We are only getting about 20% of cases that have contributory factors.

Duke Evaluation

- Next year all 100 counties will receive the fact sheet. Some of the elements on the fact sheet can only come from the 5106 so please complete that.
- We will probably include in policy that completion of the form (5106) is required. Currently there is a Dear County Director letter mandating it but it is not in policy.

Stopping Family Assessments

Wanted to discuss the policy around the ability to cease family assessments if you get there and find out that the report was baseless. Now you have to do all the Structured Decision Making tools, but there is no finding, so no Central Registry report. The only thing this lets you out of is contacting collaterals. (Might not save you much time, but if there are 15 collaterals, it will.)

This policy was not meant for malicious reports, the policy was made to address cases where there was misinformation and should have never been made. Cases where, if all the correct information had been known, the report would never had been made, or it would have been screened out. For example: A child was reported with severe burns, but after visiting discovered that the child has severe eczema and the family is treating appropriately.

Malicious reports may be made for the wrong motivation but doesn't mean they are not true. There is a separate malicious report policy.

- One county said the issue here was that it says you can stop when you have enough information to complete the tools. If you have enough to do this, then basically you have done a complete assessment.

About how many times do you think you have stopped an assessment without completing all the collaterals, etc. in the last year. Went around the room.

- Most people have done none but a couple have done one or two, one county did about 5.
- People were concerned about liability issues and that is why they either don't use it or only in extreme situations.
- Do you really get to eliminate collaterals? If you are completing the Strengths and Needs, etc. a lot of that comes from collaterals, so what are you really saving here – why don't you just go ahead and finish it and eliminate the liability.
- Does not give the families closure if we just stop after we inserted ourselves into their lives.
- When it was written the original 10 were trying to really switch philosophies and be family centered, but people aren't using it. Although when used correctly it is very family centered, but understandably it is hard to feel 100% confident about using this to stop an assessment.
- Some counties here felt that if there were medical conditions (like the eczema example) those families were used to having to explain themselves and would be forthcoming.
- Some people thought we should do away with the policy, but the majority wanted to leave it in there to give you the option, doesn't mean that you have to use it. Just clarify it.

- Another thing to clarify would be if you could switch tracks and then close it. (Ex: report that child was severely beat, so they took it as investigative, when they got there, no marks on the child, so switched to family assessment, and then might have used the policy and closed it, but weren't sure if you could use this even if the case was a family assessment if it started as an investigative.)

CFT

Required within 30 days of case decision, quarterly thereafter, if high or intensive risk must have a facilitator that is not the SW for the case. Case plans must be completed in CFTs. What part of this policy need to be clarified?

- Most people here are holding these and are making the case plans at these meetings.

CFSR Issues

Dealing with non-custodial parents. This was a big issue with the CFSR.

During the assessment you are to contact the non-custodial parent if you have any way of locating them. The Feds want this to continue into case management. They want them involved in CFTs and the case plan. We know that many of them won't participate, but during our review there was no indication that they were ever even invited.

We need to know what would help policy be more clear – everyone seems to understand that they need to be involved in 210 but not so much in 215.

- Recommended that policy spell it out clearly that they should continue to be involved in 215 and included in CFTs.
- What about incarcerated parents where there is no contact allowed? Look into the incarcerated parents extended family - some of those might want to be involved.
- Keep in mind that we can't make these people be involved, but we have to make all diligent efforts to show that we have tried.
- It puts DSS in an awkward position because it may open up a can of worms regarding custody battles. What if there already was a lengthy unpleasant custody battle, and this just gives the non-custodial parent ammunition to start the process again. How will this feel to the child?
 - These cases are there, but few and far between. You can document this and not involve the non-custodial parent as much as with other cases. However, you need to be very careful not to use this as an excuse not to involve any non custodial parent or that parent's extended family.
- Be thinking about the end of the case at the beginning. If the situation develops to the point that we are looking at taking custody, the law requires us to look for relative placements – relatives on both sides. If you have already done your legwork with regards to the other side of this child's family on both sides it will be easier.
- How much information is the non-custodial parent entitled to? If you have not TPRed you have an obligation to provide information to them. Like drugs?

Only share information as it pertains to the safety of the child, not personal lifestyles of the other parent.

- CFTs – be open and honest with both parents that issues will be discussed at the CFT – the meeting is for the best interests of the child.

Shared Parenting

1 meeting required within 7 days of child coming into care. Know this needs to be added to Chapter 4. Probably need to beef that up and ensure that there is some type of continuing contact. Know that each case will vary, but what would be a minimum?

- This was seen as a strength by the feds during the CSFR.
- Policy aside, this has to be a part of MAPP – some counties have new foster parents that are great at it and older ones that pre-date MRS that won't do it.
- Other counties have the exact reverse. A lot of this will depend on how it is presented in MAPP and also with how the worker presents the biological family to the foster parents.
- One county doesn't want any more mandated meetings because mandates just give people rules that they will often need to break, and when they are broken often enough they aren't taken seriously.
- Others felt that we do need the mandates, but since these cases are so gray, we need to be clear in the policy/mandates and allow for deviation that is documented.
- How do we prepare the birth parents? We always talk about preparing the foster parents, but not as much the birth parents?
 - Some counties feel that it is best not to have a formal meeting because the formality is intimidating, especially to the birth family.
- Think it is very jarring for a child who has had an assessor or in home services worker for some time (who they are comfortable with) and then all of a sudden they get a foster care worker they don't know.
 - Some other counties have the in home services worker do the first Shared Parenting meeting because usually the case is not transferred within 7 days.
 - Blended teams help this so that from the beginning the foster care workers are getting to know the families and children before children come into care.
 - Now that we have been doing MRS for awhile periodically we need to step back and look at how we are doing things – is it still the best way?
 - Give the birth parents a chance to vent and get their feeling out before they meet the foster care worker alone. Transition that meeting and be sure to keep the focus that this is for the child.
- Need to make sure that any private agencies that they may use for Foster Parents are on board with Shared Parenting.
- Question arose does the child need to be there? Not necessarily. If the situation is appropriate, and the child can deal with it, it could be good, but it is not necessary.

Services Recommended

Some counties may have been recommending services and then not really providing the families with the resources to take advantage of them. Feds suggested that we might need to do a little handholding to get the families involved with the services we recommend. Policy requires a visit within 7 days to talk about the finding of Services Recommended.

This is for cases where there are well being needs but there are no safety issues and at no time would the safety issues ever have been enough to create adequate risk to substantiate or find In Need of Services. (This differentiates it from Services Provided, CPS services no longer needed, because in those cases there was initially enough risk that had you not put services in place, there would have been a finding necessitating mandatory services.)

- Do we just say “here is a list of services and leave, or do we help them make a phone call, get them set up for their first appointment, etc.
- It may be a service that will be provided by a community agency but we can help the family get connected with those agencies.
- Different ways to pay for it.

Other Issues/Discussion

Findings for an assessment when you also have an open in home services case

- When a family is already in 215 services and a new report comes in and you do another assessment you can make a finding of no services needed because no NEW services are needed since they are already in 215 for the previous assessment. Need to clarify when this is the case.

Structured Decision making tools – can these be updated?

- Brief history of the tools
 - Back in 2002 another state did some research on some structured tools. Therefore they are research based and we borrowed them.
 - Now the research is saying that the tool might have been appropriate for the population of the state that developed them, but they might not be as effective or appropriate for use in other states with different populations.
 - The tools also do not address disproportionality.
- Counties feel that they are very confusing to families, on some you want a negative score, on others it is different.
- We don't have a solution yet, but we are working on it.
- This was discussed in depth at a previous meeting with various points of view – see those notes for information (February 2007)

Summary of Feedback from CSFR

More in depth report on the process was mentioned last month – see April notes for more information.

- Have a workgroup that will be meeting to develop improved policy
 - Court Improvement – improve partnerships with courts and be more timely
 - Family relationships – non-custodial parents
 - Multi-Jurisdictional Issues – cross county issues (the feds see it as a state
 - Cultural Competency – Indian Child Welfare Act, and disproportionality
 - NC's CFSR process – accountability (we have a moratorium on this for 2 months while we revamp this process.)

Future Meetings:

June

Central – June 20th Randolph Co DSS

Eastern – June 28 – Wayne Co. WAGES

West – June 27th – Asheville - St. John's Church

July

East – July 18th Edgecombe Co

West – July 24th – Asheville - St Johns Church